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SUBJECT: FORMER PREMIER SU TSENG-CHANG ON DPP POLITICS,
UPCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS, AND HIS POLITICAL FUTURE

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young for reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Many supporters are urging him to run for county magistrate, either in Taipei County or another district in the December local elections, former Premier Su Tseng-chang told the Director. Meanwhile, other DPP partisans were advising him to avoid local politics and keep his sights focused on the 2012 presidential election. Su stressed the importance of the December elections for the DPP, saying it could be "all over" for the party if it fails to do well. Without directly criticizing the leadership of Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen, Su suggested the DPP remains divided and needs to focus on standing up to President Ma Ying-jeou and winning over middle class voters. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Director and former Premier Su Tseng-chang discussed the December city and county elections, DPP politics and Su's future during a lunch meeting on January ¶12. While not revealing his own preferences, Su noted that many people were asking him about running in the 2009 race in Taipei County or even elsewhere, including Kaohsiung or Taichung city/county elections in 2010, if the legislature agrees to create these mega-districts. Some others, however, have advised Su not to return to local politics since he has already served as county magistrate in Pingtung and Taipei, but instead to set his sights higher on the 2012 presidential election. Describing the DPP as at a critical juncture, Su said many supporters are looking to him to "rescue" the party, which continues to be divided. While complaining that the prosecution of the former President had a strongly partisan cast to it, Su lamented that too much of the DPP's attention remains focused on Chen Shui-bian and his corruption cases. Instead, he argued, the party should have devoted its energies over the past several months to standing up to President Ma Ying-jeou and working to win over Taiwan's middle class. The DPP must concentrate on doing well in the December local elections, he stressed. If the party fails to do well, "it will be all over." Because party leaders realize this, they are very anxious to produce a strong slate of viable candidates.

¶3. (C) The DPP may announce a second tranche of candidates for the December elections as early as Tuesday (January 13), Su predicted. The frontrunner in Tainan County is former Presidential Office Secretary General Mark Chen, who previously served as magistrate from 1993-2001. Although 73 years old, Chen is in good health and his solid public support ratings should help secure a victory in the DPP

heartland. Su did not speculate on possible DPP candidates other than himself. The KMT, he suggested, would like to dump incumbent Taipei County Magistrate Chou Hsi-wei, widely viewed as having done a poor job. To do so, however, the KMT would have to give Chou some "candy" (i.e., a significant government position) to prevent him from causing problems for the KMT candidate. Su acknowledged that Taichung Mayor Jason Hu might be a possible alternative to Chou in Taipei County, adding that Hu could have multiple possibilities given his solid background and track record. (Note: A recent poll by pro-Blue TVBS suggested that Su would win easily against Chou and would stand a 50-50 chance in a contest with Hu.)

Comment

14. (C) Whether or not he chooses to run in the December local elections, Su clearly wants to continue playing an important role in politics. The Taipei County election is shaping up as the key race in the 2009 December local elections. Because the DPP will need a strong showing this December to have a shot in the 2012 presidential election, Su will come under considerable pressure to carry the DPP standard in Taipei County. DPP contacts told us recently that Su canceled a planned extended overseas trip in order to stay close to the fluid political situation. Su told the Director that he will visit his daughter in Texas for a week during Chinese new Year and will ponder his options when he returns.

SYOUNG